

Committee on Resources,

Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, & Public Lands

[parks](#) - - Rep. Joel Hefley, Chairman

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Witness Statement

STATEMENT OF MILTON CERNY, PRESIDENT
AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
RESOURCES CONCERNING
ON
H.R.1161, A BILL TO AUTHORIZE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MEMORIAL TO TOMAS G.
MASARYK IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your Subcommittee today in support of H.R.1161, Rep. Benjamin Gilman's (R-NY) legislation which would authorize the establishment of a memorial to Tomas Garrigue Masaryk in the District of Columbia.

The American Friends of the Czech Republic is the national non-profit organization that advances a civil, legal, democratic society and a free-market economy in the Czech Republic while strengthening the education, cultural, commercial and security partnerships between the United States and the Czech Republic. It is a 501(c)(3) public charity that has educated our leaders and opinion makers in such areas as NATO expansion, trade, culture and Czech heritage.

Foremost on our current agenda is supporting the passage of legislation, which we believe will honor a champion of liberty, promoter of human rights, and defender of the democratic principles of the United States, Tomas Garrigue Masaryk. This effort has received the enthusiastic support of the leaders in the Czech Republic, most notably, President Vaclav Havel and the Ambassador to the United States, Alexandr Vondra and government and community leaders throughout the United States.

Tomas Garrigue Masaryk, the first President of Czechoslovakia, stands in history as the best embodiment of the close ties between the United States and Czechoslovakia. A philosopher, scholar and teacher, Tomas

Garrigue Masaryk accomplished a great deal in the United States. During repeated trips he taught in the United States, married a young woman from Brooklyn, NY, and developed personal relationships with some of the most illustrious American political figures of the time. However, all of this pales in comparison to his most notable achievement. For six months Masaryk traveled throughout the United States writing the Czechoslovak Declaration of Independence from Austria that was signed in Philadelphia and issued here in Washington, D.C. on October 18, 1918, where he was declared the President of Czechoslovakia.

I am joined today by Michael Novak of the American Enterprise Institute and recent recipient of the Tomas Garrigue Masaryk Medal. Mr. Novak will speak in more detail as to Tomas Garrigue Masaryk's connection with the United States and his prominent place in history. Mr. Chairman, I would like to focus the remainder of my testimony on the legislation, which has led to this hearing.

Although the American Friends of the Czech Republic has served as the catalyst for this effort to honor President Masaryk with a Memorial in Washington, D.C., we are supported in this endeavor by the Czech Republic and by dozens of Czech and Slovak organizations throughout the United States. Rep. Benjamin Gilman has championed our cause through the introduction of this legislation. I would also like to make the subcommittee aware of a counterpart to this legislation, S. 621, sponsored by another friend of the Czech community, Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-NE) and his cosponsors Senators Richard Lugar (R-IN), Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) and Jeff Bingaman (D-NM).

Mr. Chairman, as you are aware, in accordance with the Commemorative Works Act, H.R.1161 provides congressional authorization for the placement of a Memorial to honor Tomas Garrigue Masaryk in Washington, D.C. However, at this time we would like to address two issues contained in the legislation. Prior to this hearing, representing the American Friends, I met with John Parsons and his staff at the National Park Service to discuss the bill, reviewing Masaryk's significance in history, and outlining our desire to gain the support of the National Capital Memorial Commission during this undertaking. I would like to thank Mr. Parsons for his willingness to work with us on this legislation and his helpful words and advice. On April 26, the Commission unanimously voted to support the concept of a proposed memorial and we express our appreciation to the Commission for this important endorsement.

A potential site is described in the bill, a park located in front of the World Bank on Pennsylvania Avenue. It was our suggestion that the site holds a strong connection to President Masaryk's time spent in Washington, D.C. and his philosophy of political change. This particular park sits only a short walk away from a site that once housed the Powhantan Hotel, which served as Masaryk's residence while in Washington. We believe that having the World Bank as a backdrop to this tribute would also be fitting as this organization seeks to support the growth of free and democratic states, including the Czech Republic. We also understand that the decision on placement must be made by the Park Service in accordance with the Commemorative Works Act. We want to assure the Committee of our intention to work with the Congress and the Park Service in selecting an appropriate site under the Commemorative Works Act. Therefore, Mr. Chairman, if the Committee moves forward on consideration of this legislation, at that time we will work with you, Rep. Gilman, and staff to present a new version of this legislation which does not contain the site specifications.

Additionally, another aspect of HR 1161 which needs further clarification is our intention that the statue be a gift from the Czech Republic to the United States. As stated in the present legislation, the American Friends of the Czech Republic would be authorized to establish this memorial. It has always been our intent to have the statue presented as a gift of the Czech Republic to the United States and we would remain financially responsible for its placement and maintenance. If authorized by Congress, the sculpture will be

presented as a gift to the American people by the Czech Republic.

Mr. Chairman, I am very pleased to support these changes. I recently returned from the Czech Republic, visiting the cities of Pilsen and Prague and received strong support from the mayors of these cities for the memorial. We have also received strong support from President Vaclav Havel and from communities throughout the Czech Republic. Funding will be raised to pay for the sculpture so that the people of the Czech Republic can take part in honoring their most revered leader. As this process proceeds, Ambassador Vondra and his Embassy staff will work with us on coordinating this aspect. In the United States, Czech and Slovak community organizations are raising funds for a permanent endowment to care for the sculpture and to provide an educational fund to teach young Czech students the ideals of democracy and free enterprise that were so important to President Masaryk and his place in American history. Having the Czech Republic present the sculpture will bestow a worthy honor for our ally in world affairs. It is our hope that the unveiling of the Masaryk sculpture will coincide with a state visit in the spring of 2002 by President Vaclav Havel to the United States to meet with President Bush at which time a joint unveiling of the sculpture can take place.

The Czech Republic together with the American Friends of the Czech Republic are honored to present this sculpture to the people of the United States and the city of Washington and to support the future upkeep and maintenance of the memorial so that it does not become a burden to U.S. tax payers. As indicated, we also intend to establish a living memorial with excess funds raised in support of the Masaryk Memorial to educate Czech and American students in the principles for which Masaryk stood that form the bedrock foundation for the close ties between the United States and the Czech Republic.

In conclusion Mr. Chairman, honoring Tomas Garrigue Masaryk with a memorial in Washington, D.C. would provide a point of focus in the understanding of the role that he played in the spread of freedom and democracy to other parts of the world. More importantly, it will also serve as a reminder to visitors of our nation's capital that the foundation and principles that the United States is based upon transcend language, time, and ethnicity. That the American ideals of freedom and democracy ingrained in just one individual can impact millions throughout history.

I would like to thank you for providing this opportunity to appear today before your subcommittee and speak in support of H.R.1611 and I am prepared to answer any questions you may have.

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